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Introduction to This Issue

As a literary organ of Western Theological Seminary, *Reformed Review* obviously has a vested interest in the contributions faculty members of that seminary make to church and academy. So periodically we invite faculty members to write for us articles on subjects related to their respective areas of teaching and research. Late 2006 we decided that the recent hires at the seminary furnished another good occasion to devote an issue of the journal to these contributions. We did this in the belief that the seminary has succeeded in assembling a good group of new scholars who deserve to be introduced to the wider world through our publication.

Cynthia Holder Rich joined Western in 2003, after fourteen years in parish ministry and six in mission services in Madagascar, to serve as associate professor of continuing theological education. Among her areas of teaching and research include learning disabilities in the lives of youth and young adults, women in ministry, multicultural ministry, and healing divisions in the worldwide body of Christ. Her essay "Seeking a Contextual "Cry From the Heart of Faith:" The Belhar Confession and Race in the U.S." featured here gives poignant expression to her concern for racial reconciliation within the body of Christ.

The Belhar Confession emerged out of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Under the direction of Allan Boesak, it was drafted in 1982 by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) out of the conviction that apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* in which the very truth of the gospel was at stake. In April 1994 the new Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), composed of the former bodies of the DRMC and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) adopted Belhar as one of its standards of unity (along with the Belgic Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism). Subsequently, the URCSA asked the Reformed Church in America (RCA), as well as other Reformed churches worldwide to adopt Belhar as a confessional standard. Rich points out that the response of the RCA to this request has been well under way now. At its 2007 General Synod meeting, the denomination acted to adopt the Belhar Confession for a two-year period of study and discernment. If the General Synod in 2009 moves to adopt Belhar, it will become the fourth confessional standard of the denomination.

Should the RCA make this move? Does the North American context in which most RCA congregations are located bear any resemblance to that out of which Belhar came? Is racism in this context an issue against which the church must urgently take a stand? Rich gives informed and carefully considered responses to these questions, in an effort, as she expresses it, "to assist in the dialogue occurring at this time" in the RCA.

Keith Derrick joined Western in April 2007 as coordinator of continuing education with "Journey." In his essay "A Journey of Continuing Education at Western Theological Seminary," Derrick gives us the story of Journey, the new name recently given to the "center for the continuing education of the church" at Western. Derrick introduces our readers to the creative team behind Journey, describes the values and vision that shape and animate their work, and gives a chronology of continuing education at Western, a chronology that will suggest to our readers that the seminary has made it a priority for a long time to extend its educational resources to those outside its own walls. Derrick concludes his article with a series of interviews with four faculty members who have played an instrumental role in continuing education at the seminary. The momentum that Journey has generated in the churches is reflected in Derrick's energetic prose, which captures for us the mood we wish to convey through our featured contributors. The new faculty members have infused into the seminary a fresh vitality that is finding expression in new and imaginative approaches to the challenges and tasks that currently confront the church of Jesus Christ. We are gratified to offer here the contributions from two of these faculty members. Through them we hope that our readers will gain a deeper appreciation for the good things that are happening at Western Theological Seminary.

– Christopher Dorn

A Journey of Continuing Education At Western Theological Seminary

Keith A. Derrick

Continuing education at Western Theological Seminary (WTS) is located in a particular place, developed by particular people at different times, and accomplished because of shared visions, common values, and a passion for learning. Continual learning at WTS lives and is vibrant today because of a place called Journey. Journey has provided its space, a forum for significant voices that continue to value life-long learning, as well as a broader context to include all who share a passion for continual theological learning.

This paper explores the history of Journey, a center for the Church's learning at WTS in Holland, Michigan. Focus will be given first to the present dimensions of Journey's life – its current space at the seminary, the staff, the operating values and vision of Journey, specific programs for learning, and even the reason for Journey's name. Since Journey exists because of voices that have spoken "along the way," the paper will also provide a brief chronology of continuing education at the seminary. In addition, space will be given to a few of these voices so that readers may hear for themselves. Finally, an invitation will go out to all, not only to value the shared journey of life-long Christian learning, but also to live out three of Journey's expressed values: we learn the way of Jesus Christ; we learn together; we are made new by God's Spirit along the way.

Current Journey Voices: Name, Place, and Program

What's In a Name? Google the word "journey" today on your computer and you get 15,300,000 results in .06 seconds! What is amazing is not only the magnitude of listings, nor the speed at which the information is gathered, but the variety of descriptions, meanings, and uses of the word. "Journey" can be a musical group (from the late 70s), a new line of shoes, an emergent church, a travel magazine, a TV show, an adventure, and on and on.

Three specific definitions of the word "journey" from the dictionary are: (1) an act of travel from one place to another; (2) a day's travel; and (3) something suggesting travel or passage from one place to another.¹ This third definition is the image which Journey at WTS is trying to create. We are a people learning together on the way. Here is more of the story.

In 2000-2001, WTS began a strategic planning process with a subcommittee to flesh out an emerging priority "to develop a center for the continuing education

of the church.” Present in those conversations were George R. Hunsberger, professor of congregational mission; Sonja Stewart, professor of Christian education; George Brown, professor of Christian education and dean of faculty; and Tom Boogaart, professor of Old Testament (all faculty members of WTS). Their vision was to expand the seminary’s commitment to continuing education to include not just degree-seeking students but the whole people of God. They envisioned new ways of developing continual learning in and for the church. Among these were faculty mentored learning groups; partnerships for collaborative learning in the areas of discipleship, mission, leadership; lectureships, conferences, and workshops for the church. All were activities that the seminary had already been doing well. They also expressed a growing desire to expand the understanding of the role of seminary faculty to include serving as theological mentor for the church. In other words, they desired the faculty to be seen by the whole church as a theological servant of the church.

When Journey started formally in July of 2002 with the appointment of Hunsberger to be dean and developer of the center, a proposal was approved by the Lilly Foundation to initiate Journey Groups. Not only did it turn out to be the flagship program of the first five years of the center, embodying its vision of learning, but it also lended its name “Journey” to the center as a whole. “Journey” became the descriptive word and metaphor for Western’s commitment to continual theological learning. A quote from Journey’s current web site says it well:

Whether it is on the road from Ur that Abraham and Sarah traveled, or the road to Jerusalem that Jesus walked, or the road to Emmaus on which the risen Jesus joined a pair of discouraged disciples, the people of God have always recognized themselves to be journeying to the promises of God, growing in faith, love, and hope, knit together as a traveling community on the Way.²

What is in a name? For Journey at WTS, it is all about learning together on the Way; learning about being faithful disciples of Christ; learning in and with a company of other disciples; finding ourselves made ever new by the power and presence of God’s transforming Spirit.

What’s In a Place? Since 2003 Journey has enjoyed a home at WTS. In the Garden Level of the seminary’s DeWitt Theological Center (and recent building addition of 2003), one will find offices, work spaces, two meeting/conference rooms, one classroom, and several decorated spaces for conversation and hospitality. The current Journey staff include: George R. Hunsberger, dean of Journey and professor of congregational mission; Cynthia Holder Rich, associate professor of continuing theological education; Keith A. Derrick, coordinator of continual

theological learning; Pablo Canche, program associate for Latino theological education; and CarolAnn Bailey and Judy Bos, the two administrative associates. All these staff members work in this Journey space. Growing out of Journey, which is located in the Garden Level, (excuse the pun!) are continual learning opportunities, developing partnerships, ecumenical collaborations, new initiatives, and creative ways of learning to be God's people on the Way.

On a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, this staff interacts, debates, and makes decisions on the kinds of learning opportunities to offer the seminary community and the church. It is clearly evident in these rich conversations that the vision of being a "center for the continuing education of the church" is, on the one hand, accomplished with dedication and passion, but, on the other hand, will never be completely realized because none of us has arrived yet.

What's In a Program? Someone asked recently, "How does Journey decide the kinds of events to offer the church?" One approach to answering that question is by explaining the "value filters" working among our staff members. The following six get expressed on a regular basis in lively and engaging ways:

1. Events that promote theological learning from a Reformed perspective.
2. Opportunities that square with Journey's missional understanding of the church.
3. Learning that is ecumenical in spirit and diverse in perspective.
4. Programs that can reflect the "reign of God" in understanding and interpretation.
5. Learning events that engage people biblically and theologically.
6. Balancing both listening/responding to the church and leading the church.

These filters provide the criteria by which we determine the kinds of events to offer the church. When we have developed the learning themes for each event, we connect them to a specific event model that will best accomplish the learning goals. For example, some events are conferences, e.g., a one or two day event for presentation, dialogue, study, and interaction. Other learning occurs in a workshop format over one day. Journey offers learning experiences over a more extended time, with other learning partners, called Journey Groups. Travel study seminars are offered (thanks here to Donald Bruggink, who is the well-traveled director of the international travel seminars). Online courses and global forums connect people around the world on issues of global importance. The Children and Worship program is a specific training course. Seminars are created and offered because some learning opportunities require periodic meeting times in which to

learn around one theme. And there are lectures, which present a specific learning in a period of time lasting no more than an hour.

Over the years WTS and Journey have been the recipients of generous gifts, which have created sustained opportunities for learning in several important areas of church life. The Ridder Leadership Conference, the Osterhaven Lectures, and the Bast Preaching Program are all made possible by endowment funds. Other Journey programs, including the annual 1-3-5 Gathering (an event for recent graduates of Western's Master of Divinity program, at their first, third, and fifth year anniversaries), the Journey Groups, our annual Children and Worship Training Workshop, and the Smaller Membership Church Initiative (consisting of members from Episcopal, ELCA, PCUSA, and RCA regional churches) are grant-based ongoing programs. Finally, a variety of seasonal Journey events are created with a view to current issues important for the church's learning.

The point of listing the variety of these Journey programs is to give the reader an image of the "journey within Journey." There are many companions on this journey of continual learning – people valuing Christian education, creatively shaping events and learning opportunities, and forging partnerships that are developing and strengthening our way of learning to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The staff at Journey gives thanks to all of God's people who are learning on the Way. We give thanks to God for you.

During the most recent Fall 2007 "season of learning," Journey offered eleven learning events, consisting of two global forums, four conferences, three workshops, one lecture, and one online course. Six hundred-forty people attended these events. But for us at Journey, it is not about the numbers. Rather, our exclusive focus is to strive to create a context for learning to occur, regardless of the number participating. In addition to the Journey staff, scores of other people played a significant part in making these eleven events possible. Faculty members, planning teams, church leaders, and lay members of congregations throughout the church, even within and beyond the RCA, added another ninety-eight voices to the process of planning Journey events and of sustaining the learning after those events. The vision of being a "center for the church's learning" also includes being a place where the church participates in its own learning. What's in a program? People with vision for continual learning, people with passion for Christian education, people with commitments of time, money, and energy. Many companions on the way!

A Brief Chronology of Continuing Education at WTS

The staff at Journey also looks back in appreciation and sees how far this way extends back in time. In 1956, a WTS faculty committee consisting of three

professors (Mennenga, Kuyper, Mulder) was listed in the WTS catalog as a "Lecture Committee."³ Two lectures were offered that year to WTS faculty and students, one by Markus Barth and one by Hendrick Kraemer.

In 1963, the language in the WTS course catalog changed from "Lecture Committee" to "Lecture Series."⁴ This series was divided into "WTS Faculty Lectures" and "Guest Lectures."⁵ Eleven lectures were offered on the 1963-64 WTS calendar, consisting of three faculty lectures and eight guest lectures. By 1965, the series of guest lectures constituted an independent offering. The expressed goal of the Guest Lecture Program was to provide "a stimulating intellectual fellowship, enhancing the students' relation to a higher level of academic work and to a greater appreciation for the depths and scope of current theological inquiry."⁶

In 1969-70, special study opportunities were offered through WTS, including (1) Western Christendom Travel Seminars; (2) the Annual Management Seminar for seniors and (3) and a separate lecture program designed to enhance the regular student study program.⁷ Sonja Stewart joined WTS in 1970 as a part-time teacher in the Christian Education field. In 1980 she became an associate professor and full-time faculty member. Later in the mid-1980s Stewart became the Director of Continuing Education at WTS and fulfilled that role until 1988.

The 1983-84 WTS course catalog distinguished between the Lecture Series and Continuing Education, with ten lectures listed in the series and twelve workshops offered as independent educational events.⁸ The workshops brought to Western's campus such well-known names in the field of education as Sharon Parks, James Loder, and Jerome Berryman. Berryman was to play an instrumental role in Sonja Stewart's development of the Children and Worship program.

In 1987 the M.E. Osterhaven Lecture Series was inaugurated. This endowed program is designed to bring attention to the particular contributions of Reformed theology to the church. Such distinguished theologians of the church as James I. McCord, Martin E. Marty, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Lesslie Newbigin, and I. John Hesselink have lectured at WTS as part of this series.

In 1988 George Brown was appointed as new dean of faculty. As part of his responsibilities, Brown directed continuing education. The usual pattern of lectures and workshops continued, but with his appointment a change in focus occurred. Together with Stewart, Brown began to expand its focus to encompass not only WTS students but also audiences of the broader church.

The following year marked the beginning of the Henry Bast Memorial Preaching Program. Its aim is the support and renewal of preaching in the RCA and in the broader church through a focus on the spoken Word. The program consists of five

components: preaching fellowships, a resident preacher to supervise the program, the Bast Preaching Resource Center in the Cook Center for Theological Research, the Henry Bast Professor of Preaching chair, and the Bast Preaching Lecture Series. Notable Lecture Series participants have been Fred Craddock, Eugene L. Lowry, William H. Willimon, and Eugene Peterson.

In 1994, Dennis Voskuil, president of WTS, appointed Robert A. Coughenour as continuing education program director with the express intent of expanding the program.

An advisory committee was formed at this time for the purpose. The name "CONnECTS" originated in order to give to the program identity and greater visibility. The new name of the developing program stood for "Continuing Education for Christian Training and Service. The desire of WTS to expand the program is reflected in the notes of an advisory committee meeting convened in May, 1997. The variety of ways in which the committee was envisioning how continuing education should take place include "workshops, lectures, conferences, classis seminars, travel-study seminars, intercultural immersions, evening courses, certificate programs for laity, educational consultations, faculty services, distance learning, and special status for non-degree seeking students." By this time, Brown had been reassigned responsibilities for CONnECTS, and Evelyn Diephouse named as assistant director (1996-97). In 1996, CONnECTS co-sponsored the "Confident Witness-Changing World" Conference with the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) under the leadership of George R. Hunsberger.

The Herman J. and Lenora Ridder Leadership Initiative began in 1997. This endowed program focuses on issues of leadership in the church and originally envisioned a biennial conference. Recent speakers at these conferences were Lyle E. Schaller, Max DePree, Bill Hybels, Jim Herrington, and Trisha Taylor. In 1999, a search began for a full-time CONnECTS Director, but without success. Two years later, WTS gathered people together to speak to the issue of the future direction of CONnECTS. These voices are Sonja Stewart, George Brown, Tom Boogaart, and George Hunsberger. In the next section, the reader will have occasion to listen to those of Brown and Hunsberger, in addition to those of Vicky Menning and Cynthia Holder Rich.

Listening to Some Voices of the Past

The following consists of interviews that the author conducted with the four persons just mentioned. The first is with George Brown, current dean of faculty at WTS, who played a vital role in continuing education from 1988–2001.

What was your title and role in continuing education at WTS?

Dean of faculty, with one/fifth time responsibility for directing Western's continuing education program.

What developments in the program have you observed?

First of all, a change from continuing education to CONnECTS, which brought a clearer identity and a new label to what Western was trying to accomplish. CONnECTS was a short-hand way of saying Western wanted to expand continuing education into the broader church. Secondly, Sonja Stewart's genius was to articulate a vision of equipping people for ministry. "Equipping" was a big word in the '80s. That's why we brought to Western Seminary the big names in education at that time, including Jim Loder, Sharon Parks, Maria Harris, and Tom Groome.

What developments have been most significant for you?

The most rewarding, and at the same time the most disappointing, because it has not continued, was the effort in developing a publishing arm to our continuing education program. The dream was to stimulate theological discourse in the RCA through printed lectures, writings, and publications. *Occasional Papers* was launched in 1999 under the auspices of CONnECTS. The three published papers are: *Holiness and Hermeneutics* by James V. Brownson (no. 1); *Atonement in the Heidelberg Catechism: A Proposal for Variety* by Leanne VanDyk (no. 2); and *Taking Time To Be Holy: Christian Education in a Mach 3 Culture* by George Brown, Jr. (no. 3). There were also three published lectures: *Truth to Tell: The Gospel and Public Truth* by Lesslie Newbigin; *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* by Wolfhart Pannenberg; and *The Changing Shape of Church History* by Justo Gonzalez.

What do you value most about what is now called Journey and its role for the church?

I have to choose just one? Well, Journey provides affordable access for clergy and laity to quality theological learning. It also gives opportunities to laity who want more in-depth learning to grow in their faith journeys. And I believe, structurally within the seminary, the creation of specific Journey space, full-time staff, and a budget, are extremely important values of the seminary, which now benefit the church. Let me just say that in prior years, continuing education was sort of an ad hoc affair, added onto other responsibilities of so many people, including the advancement and development offices. Oh, and one more, the fixed and endowed events like the Bast Preaching Program, the Osterhaven Lectures, and the Ridder Leadership Conference were quality events that gave identity and credibility to Western's continuing education program.

Who has influenced your thinking most about how you fulfilled your role in leading continuing education at Western?

Dr. Joe Levine at Michigan State University. He was my mentor while I worked on my dissertation in adult education. Cyril O. Houle, who wrote *Patterns of Learning*. He challenged me to think and believe that education and learning take place in a variety of ways, patterns, and methods. Eduard Lindemann, author of *Adult Learning in America*.

The second interview is with interview with George R. Hunsberger, current Dean of Journey, who speaks about continuing education at WTS from 2001 to the present.

What was, and is, your role with continuing education at Western?

In July 2002, I was appointed to be dean of the center, for what was then being inaugurated as a new center for the continuing education of the church. One of the first major programs of the center, our Journey Groups, eventually lent some of its name to the center, which since late 2003 has been known as "Journey: a Center for the Church's Learning." Since that time I have been dean of Journey.

What developments in the Journey program have you observed?

In the seminary's strategic planning process in 2000-2001, a subcommittee was formed to sharpen a vision for the future of continuing education at Western. George Brown, Sonja Stewart, Tom Boogaart, and I looked not only at the design of events and programs, but at the role of theological faculty within the broader church. It was affirmed that within the continuing education program of WTS, the faculty would offer itself as theological mentors to the church. We discerned a wider vocation for the seminary in the church's learning, and knew this would require a greater investment of faculty resources to fulfill it. The strategic plan included another development, the creation of space for the center to have a home within the facilities of Western Seminary. The current space in the Garden Level of the DeWitt Theological Center gives Journey that home. It's a place for offices and work, but it's also a place for learning, for hospitality, for meetings, and for eating!

Another major development was the Lilly-funded Journey Groups program. This has shaped so many facets of our current program and staffing. These groups were founded on three convictions that continue to influence how we design learning opportunities: learning happens with peers; learning unfolds on a shared pathway; and congregations and pastors learn together. This grant allowed us to add staff earlier than might otherwise have been the case, including the call to Cynthia Holder Rich to join the center as a faculty member, and the hiring of our administrative assistant, CarolAnn Bailey. It has shaped how we think about how

learning happens in a variety of ways. It is really the flagship piece of our identity. Early on, the addition of part-time program staff, Rev. Vicky Menning, was significant. Vicky came in 2003 and brought an important collaborative piece to our perspective and working relationships with the RCA and other denominations. Likewise, Cynthia's voice, beginning in late 2003, brought a commitment to many multicultural and diversity initiatives, both here at Western and in the church.

We have seen a continual development over the last few years of a great variety in what we offer, both in terms of topics and the number of events and learning opportunities. We now provide on-line courses, forums for discussing global issues, and ongoing small learning groups.

What do you value most about Journey's role and purpose for the church?

I value Journey's capacity to be fluid. By that I mean the dynamic ability here in Journey to be able to respond to the needs of the church and the call of the Gospel. Journey continues to find ways to partner with staff of the RCA and other denominations. We continue to host and shepherd creative pathways for learning to take place, and we have become a place for the church to find companionship in theological learning.

Who has influenced your thinking most about how you fulfill your role?

My ministry style has been influenced deeply by my Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship staff days and by my Inter-Varsity mentor, Pete Hammond. Those early days of pastoral companions in Mississippi, while pastoring in Biloxi, and later teaching in Jackson, had a lot to do with shaping my temperament, my interests and instincts, and my model of ministry – small groups, leadership training, mentoring, and the love of being involved in people learning together. I learned so much from those early experiences.

I have a special conversational partnership with George Brown. Over the years, we have engaged in many great conversations about adult education and adult learning in the church. My involvement with the GOCN also continues to shape and influence much of what I do at Western, in my teaching, my role with the Journey Groups, and my one-on-one relationships.

The third person interviewed is Vicky Menning, who serves as coordinator of church health and coaching for the RCA. She speaks about the years 2003–2006.

What was your title and role while you were at Journey?

The official title was something like Partner for Church Revitalization, but it was the role that was significant. I was brought on the Journey staff as a program person to help coordinate partnerships between WTS, The General Synod Council (RCA) and the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes. Early in 2003, as the Regional Synod was initiating its Refocus and Natural Church Development work, there were conversations about coordinating the efforts of the RCA, Journey, and the Synod. A vision of partnership developed from these meetings.

What developments in the Journey program have you observed?

I guess partnerships come to my mind first. Journey and the RCA have partnered in so many ways recently, like leadership issues, discipleship areas, the Cooper Missional Leadership Team, and even the areas of mission services. Also, the partner events between the ELCA, the RCA, the PCUSA, and our Episcopalian friends in West Michigan have been significant and rewarding for me personally. We initiated learning events for the smaller membership churches. We helped so many of these congregations in meaningful ways.

Is that what you value most about Journey's role for the church?

Well, we do need each other and we must work together, both Journey and the church. Partnerships are important. Also, the physical space in the Garden Level is a relational space for the church. It's a place for peer groups, pastor networks, meetings, and learning. It's a real gift to the church to be able to come to the seminary and have a place for learning and conversation. We can't do the work of ministry alone. Journey is a place that brings people together for creative thinking and formation. It's a great gathering space.

Who has influenced your thinking most about how you fulfilled your role while you were here at Journey?

The teams I worked with over the years. This includes the Cooper Leadership Team, the Small Membership Churches planning teams, the Ridder Leadership Team, and the 1-3-5 Gathering planning teams. For me it's all about the relationships and conversations, and colleagues in ministry, that influence my thinking.

The fourth and final interview is with Cynthia Holder Rich, who is associate professor of theological education at WTS and Journey staff member.

What is your title and role at Journey?

My title is Associate Professor of Theological Education, which is a faculty position, located in Journey. After the Lilly-funded Sustaining Pastoral Excellence grant for the Journey Groups was secured in 2003, I was hired as a faculty mentor for four of the six Journey Groups. This was a major role for me my first year at Journey. CarolAnn Bailey was also added as an administrative assistant in January of 2004. About 60% of my time was designated to Journey Groups, with the other 40% distributed among some of my areas of interest, which are advocating for racial and ethnic learning opportunities, global issues of peace and justice, and collaborative educational events, both within the RCA and ecumenically.

What developments in the Journey program have you observed?

WTS has specifically addressed the need to provide more learning opportunities for a diverse population, and it is making this a priority, which is very encouraging to me. My personal interest in this area, and my passion for seeing it happen, has been expressed through my other role here in Journey, which is the director of racial/ethnic initiatives. I am both a faculty member and a Journey staff person. These two roles work nicely together in being able to create and develop a Certificate Program in Urban Pastoral Ministries for pastors in urban settings in West Michigan, and being able to chair a diversity committee here at Western.

Rev. Pablo Canche has recently joined the Journey staff as a part-time Program Associate, working with me on some of the racial/ethnic initiatives, specifically for the Hispanic community. We just received a \$20,000 grant from the Wabash Center to promote diversity within the church.

I think some other developments have begun, that I am also pleased about. I'm hoping these can become trademarks of our Journey program. They are programs and learning events focused on peacemaking, women in ministry, justice educational issues, global forums, and racial learning.

Also, I believe the Journey space at Western Seminary has allowed more conversations to occur that will affect how we do theological education for the church in the future. It's a meeting place for organizations, groups, and various planning teams of the RCA.

What developments have been most significant for you?

The growth of the racial/ethnic diversity at Western and the learning opportunities that have occurred both at Journey and within Western.

What do you value most about Journey's role and purpose for the church?

Journey is a place where the academy and the local church can come together for learning and dialogue. Too often these two parts of the church are disconnected. I believe the local congregation is the sacred reality of the church; it's where the body of Christ lives very locally. One of our jobs is to bridge and merge these two realities.

Who has influenced your thinking most about how you fulfill your role here at Journey?

It's definitely not just one person. The other voices out there that have supported me are people like Tom Boogaart, George Brown, Leanne VanDyk, and Dennis Voskuil. Also, RCA folk from the Mission Team, like Bruce Menning, Roger DeYoung, and David Dethmers. And local pastors such as J. Lewis Felton, Jeffrey Hough, and Bobbett Hampton, pastors in local urban and diverse settings.

Conclusion: An observation from the perspective of my role

Since joining the Journey staff in April of this year (2007), one of my roles as coordinator of continuing education has been to observe and listen to the development of Journey. It certainly has grown into a multi-ethnic, diverse, collaborating, multi-dimensional program center for continual theological learning. The previous voices have shared their stories, values, visions, and experiences with Journey. Their voices continue to speak to the future of where Journey is going. There are many other voices that speak into the dialogues, conversations, and debates about what it means, not only to plan learning opportunities, but what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ "on the Way." This is the way it should be! This is one of the joys of this journey at Journey. We learn together on the Way.

The image and metaphor of a journey to which God calls us as disciples of Jesus Christ is an inviting image and a challenging call. We follow the way Jesus initiated. We are disciples of Jesus and disciples of that way of life. As we continually learn the way of Jesus, we walk with our feet literally stepping into and engaging the world; we move with our eyes looking at Jesus, but watching for ways to be disciples in our contexts; we act with hands that are reaching out in ways that speak of servanthood; we think with minds that are open to ever changing ways of being faithful followers of Jesus Christ. We also learn together as the body of Christ, in a variety of communities, in a variety of ways as children, youth, and adults over a lifetime. And we are made new by the presence and activity of God's Spirit.

This promise gives us hope as disciples on the journey. We, as disciples of Jesus, living under the reign of God, are the sign, instrument, and foretaste of this reign.

We are reformed and reforming according to the Word and the Spirit. May the ways we learn to be disciples “together on the Way” always be to the glory of God.

¹ *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “journey.”

² <http://journey.westernsem.edu/about/founding>, accessed 07 February, 2008.

³ *1956/57 Western Seminary Catalog*, 8.

⁴ *1963/64 Western Seminary Catalog*, 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ *1964/65 Western Seminary Catalog*, 15, 31.

⁷ *1969/70 Western Seminary Catalog*, 17.

⁸ *1983/84 Western Seminary Catalog*, 28-9.

Seeking a Contextual “Cry From the Heart of Faith:” The Belhar Confession and Race in the U.S.

Cynthia Holder Rich

At its 2007 General Synod meeting, the Reformed Church in America (RCA) acted to provisionally adopt the Belhar Confession for a two-year period of study and discernment.¹ If the General Synod in 2009 moves to adopt the Belhar, it will become one of the confessional standards of the denomination, added to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of the Synod of Dort, all of which originated in Europe during the Reformation era.

Clearly, there is much to recommend this move. It would have a significant and positive effect on international ecumenical relationships, particularly within the Reformed family of churches. Raising the main theological themes of the Belhar – unity, reconciliation, and justice – to the level of a confessional standard would bring needed theological attention to important practical problems for the church in the world today. Adopting a confession that has come out of the southern hemisphere, out of the African continent, would have symbolic significance for the relationship of the RCA to the world church.² And finally the move would serve to advance the cause of reconciliation between persons of diverse racial backgrounds in its own context – a central goal of the RCA during the last eight years.³

But the move under consideration also raises a number of complex questions. These concern the fundamental meaning of a confession, the right time in which to adopt one, the translation of a confession from one context into another, and the actual content of a confession. These questions continue to stimulate both leaders and members of the RCA to think through what it means to be a confessional church; or, perhaps more precisely, what it might mean for their confessional church to adopt a new confession that has come out of another church in another time and place. In this article, I intend to propose ways to think through this decision by raising these questions anew. First, I investigate the original South African context out of which the Belhar Confession emerged. I then discuss the applicability of the Belhar to the U.S. context in which most members of the RCA live out their lives of Christian discipleship. In this connection, I pose to the RCA the questions, “why a new confession now?” and “why the Belhar?” – questions which provoke the need for sustained reflection and thoughtful answers at this time. My ultimate aim in this article is to point out possible paths forward, as the RCA continues its period of study and discernment.

The Emergence of the Belhar Confession: Response to Transgressions of Missions and State

The Belhar Confession arose out of a context of juxtaposed errors in ideology, theology, and missiology, all of which had resulted in massive violence, bloodshed, and the ostracizing of South Africa on the world stage. These errors had also resulted in an extreme policy of state-mandated white privilege, the aftermath of which continues to be felt today.⁴ The term used to refer to this policy was “apartheid,” an Afrikaans word that emerged to replace or discourage use of the word “segregation,” a word which seemed too active, according to Alan Paton.⁵ Apartheid means apart-ness or apart-hood.⁶ Outside of South Africa, apartheid was a term identified with hatred and became the foundation of race warfare, as well as the basis for feelings of superiority for those whose countries had not legally mandated a structure of formal race separation.

But it is important for this discussion to remember that the Belhar did not emerge only in a context in which apartheid was practiced and a multitude of laws and structures were enacted and constructed in order to keep people in their appointed places. The Dutch Reformed Church had been engaged in missionary activity for more than one hundred years before the Belhar appeared in 1982. Some of the strategies and foundational beliefs upholding the mission efforts of the Dutch Reformed Church fed directly into the issues that Belhar’s authors rejected in their confession.

To explain and interpret these efforts, C.J. Botha helpfully outlines the history of the formation of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC).⁷ The DRMC, with the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) and the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA), were born of mission programs of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC). The history of and reasons for their forming predate the imposition of apartheid (1948), but the ecclesial and missiological structures they inherited from the DRC helped uphold and maintain the policy. Because the missiological strategies and operative belief stance of the DRC called for separate churches to be formed for “blacks” (DRCA), “coloureds” (DRMC) and Indians (RCA), the DRC helped to sustain the state policy of separation, even among Christians.

Botha names the controlling tendencies of the DRC over the life, ministry, and governance of the DRMC as a particular source of conflict.⁸ Not only state-sponsored racial separation and de facto baptism of white privilege but also fundamental questions of church polity lay behind the arising of the situation that brought forth the “cry from the heart”⁹ of faith that became the Belhar Confession. Central issues discussed and debated at the Synod of Belhar

concerned who was authorized to call a meeting of the synod of a church and what role white missionary pastors serving in the DRMC, while holding membership in the DRC, could legitimately play. As Botha notes, the Church Order of Dort, when it stipulated that “no church will dominate other churches, no minister other ministers, no elder or deacon other elders or deacons,”¹⁰ showed the error in the position that a committee of one synod could veto the decisions of another. Yet this was exactly the situation in which the DRMC continued to find itself in its relationship with the DRC. One church—a white church in a missionary relationship with a “coloured” church—was dominating another. In this regard, the experience of the DRMC had much in common with many African churches founded during the height of the nineteenth century missionary era.

The Issue of Apartheid

Apart from the broad and multi-layered history in Africa of the domination of black mission churches by white parent churches, the specific issue named as grounds for a *status confessionis* at the Synod of Belhar in 1982 was the policy of apartheid. More precisely, the issue was how that state policy was both upheld and maintained by the church, and how it impacted the ministry and witness of the church. The decision of the DRMC to name apartheid as grounds for a *status confessionis* in October 1982 followed a decision of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in August of that year to make the same claim.¹¹ A *status confessionis* existed in South Africa for the church because the church had come to believe that “the very essence of the Church and the credibility of the gospel itself were threatened [and] everything was indeed at stake.”¹² In explaining both historic situations where a *status confessionis* had emerged and the situation confronting the church in South Africa in the 1980s, D.J. Smit gives the following definition:

expressing *status confessionis* means that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church, or a group of churches are of the opinion that a situation has developed, a moment of truth has dawned, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most fundamental confession concerning the Christian gospel itself, is at stake, so that they feel compelled to witness and act over against this threat.¹³

Smit further adds that such a moment is “consequently never calculated or planned [and] in one sense it surprises all those concerned.”¹⁴

The Urgency of the Hour

Many who have commented on the Belhar and the circumstances in which it was written have noted the issue of timing. The letter that accompanies the Belhar names the situation of apartheid as the cause of the “cry from the heart” of faith, and notes the “intense need for liberation” at that particular point in time.¹⁵ Addressing the RCA General Synod meeting in 2004, Christo Lombard of Namibia spoke of the moment when the Belhar emerged as “*kairos*”¹⁶ and referred to the document as “forced from our hearts and lips and lives by desperate circumstances,” which allowed only those involved to speak of the moment and the Belhar “passionately.”¹⁷ Talking of the arising of a *status confessionis*, Smit observes that people who understand “the seriousness of confession” come to know that “an hour has struck from on high in which something needs to be said.”¹⁸

The issue of timing, of the specific moment that calls for confessing, is clearly important. P.J.J.S. Els notes that “the truth about God is never as vital as in the hour of crisis.”¹⁹ There are moments when the times call for the church to take a stand. Two key twentieth century events – the Holocaust in Europe and apartheid in southern Africa – are prime examples. These have often been compared by those reflecting on the issue of timing.²⁰ In crises like these, knowing what time it is, and knowing for what kind of action a particular hour calls, is crucial in the effort to follow God.

Dismantling Unjust Structures

The Belhar Confession was understood by its authors and by the Synod that acted to bring it forth as a call for “the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society.”²¹ Apartheid and misguided missiological strategies had their roots in long-standing relationships between peoples whose skin color differed, both on the African continent and in other places. They were born out of the thousands of years during which these relationships were lived out. The peoples from Europe, whose culture and experience of life taught them different truths than those they saw operative in these other places, sought to re-assert their own truths by legislating boundaries and ways of being that of course advantaged them, often at the expense of the other. They did this so well in South Africa, in fact, that, according to Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, the system of apartheid made “all but the most determined white critics not only indifferent to, but unaware of the suffering taking place in the parallel worlds of white South African and (so-called) colored or mixed-race populations.”²² This arrangement was successful in its aims to a high degree. Working toward a dismantling of the structures that upheld this multi-layered, complex set of relationships would undoubtedly be an equally multi-layered, complex task. U.S. President Abraham

Lincoln, speaking in the context of that country's Civil War and the slavery practices that preceded it, wondered if the undoing of injustice might take, if the Almighty willed, an equal spilling of blood as that which came from the injustice that the undoing was seeking to address.²³ When they called for nothing more or less than the dismantling of the structures of injustice in church and society, in thought, word, and deed, the authors of the Belhar were calling for embarking on a journey that would take the churches and the people of South Africa many years, and perhaps many generations, to complete.

In South Africa, the Belhar Confession emerged out of a context formed by more than a century of domination of a parent church over a daughter church, a troubled relationship characterized by a dysfunctional dynamics of race that eventually found expression in ecclesial support for legal oppression. It emerged at a time when violence in South Africa had raised concern among international Christian bodies to the point that they found it necessary to issue statements declaring that the very gospel of Jesus was at stake there, and that the only response was to demand a thorough dismantling of the architecture upholding the system of persecution and separation. Having sketched the original context out of which the Belhar arose, I now turn to the context in which the RCA is considering it for adoption today.

The RCA and the Belhar Confession

As I have shown, there are many good reasons for the RCA to adopt the Belhar Confession as one of its confessional standards. Among these include the fact that it is the first confession to arise from the southern hemisphere; that it is a confession by a people of a different racial and cultural background than that of the majority of RCA members; that it is a confession written in the twentieth century; and, finally, that it is a confession whose main themes – unity, reconciliation, and justice – are absent from the three historic confessional standards of the RCA. All these reasons are cause for joyful celebration and heartfelt gratitude for this gift from the church in South Africa; they argue strongly for its adoption.

Another important reason is the distinctively Reformed witness in the theology of the Belhar. Allan Boesak, one of its primary authors, spoke on this point at a conference in the months leading up to the Synod of Belhar. On behalf of the DRMC, he stated:

We believe passionately with Abraham Kuyper that there is not a single inch of life that does not fall under the lordship of Christ...Here the reformed tradition comes so close to the African idea of the wholeness of life that these two should combine to

renew the thrust that was brought to Christian life by the followers of Calvin.²⁴

The melding of the African idea of the unity and wholeness of life (*ubuntu*²⁵ and *Motho ke motho ka motho*²⁶) with the thought of a Calvinist theology standard-bearer such as Abraham Kuyper may sound as surprising to us today as it did to some who heard it when it was first spoken in 1981. Yet this startling joining of concepts, crossing cultures, histories, and racial boundaries, presents an opportunity to see both the Belhar and the whole of Reformed theology afresh. This contributes yet one more reason to look favorably on the Belhar's adoption.

Why a New Confession For the RCA Now?

Thinking about adopting the Belhar also raises questions. For the RCA, these have become pointed at this time. I do not presume to have conclusive answers to all these questions, nor is it even for me as a scholar serving with the RCA as a non-member to proffer them. I merely intend to make the following observations to assist in the dialogue occurring at this time in that church.

The first of these is clear: why a new confession now? What does it mean to a church to adopt a new confession? G.D. Cloete has defined a confession as "the church's response to the call of God in a concrete situation."²⁷ What does confessing mean to the RCA in its own concrete situation? For the DRMC in the 1980s, the gospel itself was seen to be at stake and the church at risk. Is the gospel at stake in the RCA today? Is the church at risk? In other words, is the RCA in a *status confessionis* at present, and if so, what is it concerning? Some have offered answers. Paul Fries contends that the *status confessionis* confronting the RCA is, indeed, the "gift and invitation of the United Church of Southern Africa" concerning the Belhar itself, and that the RCA "must and will confess either by adopting the Belhar or by refusing to do so. And by responding to 'the other,' however we choose, we will be changed."²⁸ Fries makes a compelling point about the importance of this time in which a choice is to be made. Is his estimation of the issue before the church correct? If it is, are there other aspects of this choice that need to be considered?

The Belhar Confession arose at a particular time, a time when the faithful understood the response of the church to the events that were transpiring to be "a cry from the heart" of faith. At this crucial moment, the situation there became clarified in a new way, so that apparent "truths" that had been understood as such for decades were shown to be lies.²⁹ The moment called for reading the signs of the times, a distinctly Christian act, to which we are called by Christ (Matthew 16:1-4). South African theologians called their brothers and sisters to find ways to correctly read the signs that were evident to those who

had adequate ears and eyes. This call continues to the present day. Russel Botman urges the church in South Africa today to read the signs of the times, because in his estimation, the times “call for a concrete manifestation of discipleship, inclusive and critical.”³⁰ What are the signs of the times for the RCA today? When read correctly, what do they portend? Do they call for a new confession for the RCA now?

Why the Belhar?

For a number of years, the RCA General Synod has named racial reconciliation as a key reason for the church to consider adopting the Belhar. To be sure, since in North America we do not live in a context of state-legislated separation of people by race, there is a sense in which a direct translation of the Belhar from the South African context to our own is questionable. Yet if we proceed with the understanding that adopting the Belhar Confession will equip the RCA to work toward racial reconciliation in our time and place, we can certainly present our own current crises in race relations as grounds to justify that adoption. Here are just a few of the many that the church should confront and address.

- Affirmative action policies have been outlawed in many states, including Michigan, a state in which the RCA has a significant number of its members. In that state, the measure to outlaw affirmative action policies was called (not without a sense of perverse irony), the “Michigan Civil Rights Initiative.” While race preference is now illegal in Michigan, evidence of disparities on many fronts continues to mount.
- Nationwide, 78% of eligible white high school students graduated from high school in 2002. In the same year, 56% of eligible African-Americans and 52% of eligible Latino/a students graduated. Interestingly, there is some good news in this: even with this obvious level of disparity, African-American adults have narrowed a gap that has existed between them and white adults by earning more high school diplomas in recent years. On the other hand, the gap has widened with respect to college degrees. Thirty percent of white adults had at least a bachelor’s degree in 2005, while 17% of African-American adults and 12% of Latino/a adults had a bachelor’s degree.
- In the U.S., on average, one out of every three African-American males will be incarcerated one or more times during his lifetime.
- The federal government has taken notice of ethnic and racial disparities in health, education, and interface with the correctional system. Two programs, Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) of the Centers for Disease Control, and the Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC) initiative of the U.S. Justice Department, have been developed to address these disparities. REACH seeks to confront and

lessen disparities proven to exist in access to and quality of health care for African-American and Latino/a citizens. One of their action areas is in the state of Michigan, which has regions particularly noted for the problems experienced in accessing quality health care by racial ethnic citizens. The DMC program was initiated after some years of research to prove that minority youth were much more likely to be confined in juvenile detention or in local, state, or federal prisons than their white peers, even when they were arrested for the same type or class of offenses.

- Seventy-five percent of white households owned their homes in 2005, compared with 46 percent of black households and 48 percent of Latino/a households. Home ownership is near an all-time high in the United States, but racial gaps have increased in the past 25 years.

The Accompanying Letter to the Belhar Confession can be compared to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from the Birmingham Jail,"³¹ which King wrote to white clergymen in Birmingham, Alabama, who had encouraged King to wait and be patient until the time was right for change. Both letters serve as apologia for the urgency of the hour and the reasons why action has to be taken and taken now. Both call upon Christians to take a stand and live out the convictions of their faith. To be sure, today members of the RCA are not living in apartheid-era South Africa or in Alabama in the time of segregation and Jim Crow. Yet as the few examples above show, there are many issues that confront those with eyes to see and ears to hear. If the RCA chooses to adopt the Belhar in an effort to work toward racial reconciliation, is the church also ready to face the truth of racial disparities that continue to haunt King's dream of the day when all can come to experience life in freedom, liberty, and justice for all? Oliver Patterson encouraged the RCA to be "transformed by the renewal of our minds" and called for a variety of concrete actions to live out the Belhar Confession's adoption.³² Is the RCA ready to answer Patterson's call – to live into racial reconciliation and live out a ministry and witness to the goals of unity, reconciliation, and justice? Specifically, what injustices and disparities in U.S. society today is the RCA ready to confront and address, in living into their confession of the Belhar?

Conclusion: Options for the Path Forward

Out of the crisis of the era of apartheid arose a statement of great courage, wisdom, and faith that came to be known as the Belhar Confession and its Accompanying Letter. Since the end of apartheid, concern among some of the leaders of the communion in which the Belhar came to speech has grown about what some have called the church's "absence" and "silence" when facing continuing race and class disparity and evidence of injustice in governmental policies and practices in South Africa. Botman outlines the distress voiced by a number of South African theologians on what he terms the church's "slumber."

He quotes Jim Cochrane, John de Gruchy, and Robin Petersen in their analysis of the post-apartheid church in South Africa, whose praxis they understand as directed at “creating, maintaining, and developing membership.” This, they contend, leads to a “clericalism inherent to this praxis,” leading in turn to “ministers servicing members” as the chief end of their work.³³ Botman calls upon the post-apartheid church in South Africa to examine the meaning and content of Christian discipleship, and to take on the “theo-logic” of following Christ. He states that, “in a situation of enmity and injustice, God is revealed in a special way as the God of justice standing with those against whom the injustice is being done and God calls the church to stand where God is standing.”³⁴ Botman encourages exploration of the work of Craig Dykstra and other scholars and theologians researching Christian discipleship practices, and urges the church to move toward an emphasis on forming disciples. He is seeking a way to bridge the gap between the “content and intent of the [Belhar] confession” and the theology on the ground of the Black church in South Africa today. Botman believes that this goal will only be reached through training all church members in the practices of Christian discipleship, so that all members can offer their own wisdom to the ongoing task of discerning the vocation of the church in the world in this era. If this is made manifest, then

[the poor] will participate in practices that have inherent to them the ‘goods’ of a theological struggle for liberation and the redemption of humanity. In this way South Africa will feel the public effect of the practices of church unity, reconciliation, social justice and a critical loyalty to the state. These are the practices of the Confession of Belhar.³⁵

What wisdom discerned by Botman and other theologians in South Africa today can be put to use by the RCA? What are the practices of discipleship to which God is calling the church in North America? How can living out and living into the adoption of the Belhar Confession awaken the RCA from its slumber, and give the church the power and the will to be a voiced and not a silent communion on issues of unity, reconciliation, and justice?

Smit’s reminder in 1984 to his brothers and sisters in the DRMC and other Christians in South Africa is cogent for us as well: that in speaking forth this new confession, “the Church will have to know that she has spoken with a bold word that now will have to be realized with acts of obedience.”³⁶ The RCA, in provisionally adopting the Belhar Confession, has taken a step toward the day when acts of obedience will be required of the church in its life and witness. The full adoption of the Belhar Confession can be a positive first step for the RCA, as part of a churchwide group of initiatives toward racial reconciliation. If the church understands this as one step and not the end of the road; if the church develops realistic and grounded plans to continue the journey; if the RCA

discerns ways to move forward in action and reflection from this good first step, this action can be a true turning point of faithfulness for the church. May it be so.

¹ Reformed Church in America *General Synod 2007 Minutes*, 276.

² *GS 2003 Minutes*, address of Rev. Greta van Wieren, 189.

³ *RCA GS 2000 Minutes*, 100; *GS 2001 Minutes*, 90; *GS 2002 Minutes*, 175; *GS 2003 Minutes*, 185-188; *GS 2004 Minutes*, 243; *GS 2005 Minutes*, 250; *GS 2006 Minutes*, 164-168; *GS 2007 Minutes*, 275.

⁴ Public Radio International's *The World*, 19 November 2007. www.theworld.org/?q=node/14147; accessed 21 November 2007.

⁵ Alan Paton, *The New York Times*, 24 October 1960.

⁶ *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, 2006, s.v. "apartheid."

⁷ C.J. Botha, "Belhar – A Century-Old Protest", in G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit., eds., *A Moment of Truth: The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church 1982* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 66-80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹ From the *Accompanying Letter* that was written and distributed with the original drafts of the Belhar Confession. The authors note that the new confession is not made "as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel..."

¹⁰ *Dort Church Order*, art. 85, quoted in Botha 1984, 67.

¹¹ D.J. Smit, "What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" in G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit., eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 15-16.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ *Accompanying Letter to the Confession of Belhar*, 1982.

¹⁶ Greek for "right or opportune moment."

¹⁷ *RCA GS Minutes 2004*, 218.

¹⁸ Smit, "What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" 19.

¹⁹ P.J.J.S. Els, "The Role of the 'Hour' in True and False Prophecy" in G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit., eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 81.

²⁰ Smit, "What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" 16; and Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, "From Barmen to Belhar: Public Theology in Crisis Situations" in *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27:1 (2006), 23-33.

²¹ *Accompanying Letter to the Belhar Confession*, 1982.

²² van Leeuwen, "From Barmen to Belhar," 24.

²³ Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln's_second_inaugural_address; accessed 01 December 2007.

²⁴ Allan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984), 87.

²⁵ A Bantu word referring to rightness in human relations and wholeness and unity in life.

²⁶ A Setswana proverb, literally translated "I am because you are".

²⁷ G.D. Cloete, "Let us Hold Fast our Confession", in G.D. Cloete and D.J. Smit., eds., *A Moment of Truth*, 93.

²⁸ Paul Fries, "Reflections on Confessing", in *Reformed Review* 60:1 (Fall 2006).

http://www.westernsem.edu/files/westernsem/fries_fa06_0.pdf.

²⁹ *Accompanying Letter to the Belhar Confession*, 1982.

³⁰ H. Russel Botman, "Discipleship and Practical Theology: The Case of South Africa," in *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 4:2 (2000).

³¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from the Birmingham Jail", in *Letter from the Birmingham Jail and I Have A Dream* (Atlanta: Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1963).

³² *RCA GS Minutes 2003*, 187.

³³ Botman, "Discipleship and Practical Theology: The Case of South Africa," 201.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

³⁶ Smit, "What Does *Status Confessionis* Mean?" 65.

Book Reviews

The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources, by John D. Witvliet, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 170pp., \$16.00.

The Crucifixion of Ministry, by Andrew Purves, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007. 149pp., \$16.00 (paper).

Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries, edited by Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. xxx, 930pp., \$49.95.

The Living Voice of the Gospels, by Francis J. Moloney, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 344 pp., \$19.95.

The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry, edited by Craig Van Gelder, Missional Church Series, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 253pp., \$ 20.00.

The Netherlands Reformed Church: 1571-2005, by Karel Blei (translated by Allan J. Janssen), Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006. xv, 176pp., \$25.00.

The Promise of Baptism: An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition, by James V. Brownson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007, 223 pp., \$16.00.

Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church, by Peter Schmiechen, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005. xi, 371pp., \$35.00.

Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea, by Richard A. Horsley, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007. x, 262pp., \$24.95 (paper).

Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp, by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006, 210 pp., \$25.00.

Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church, by James K. A. Smith, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. 156pp., \$17.99.

The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction & Guide to Resources, by John D. Witvliet, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 170pp., \$16.00.

This volume is the latest in the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies series, of which the author is the editor. The series has already sponsored ten significant studies that probe the history, theology, and practice of Christian worship. Witvliet's own contribution on the Psalms in Christian worship is an addition worthy of inclusion.

Witvliet avows that he was motivated to write "out of a great enthusiasm for a renewed appreciation for and use of the biblical Psalms" (48). His enthusiasm finds ample expression in the two parts that comprise the volume. In the first part, the author guides the reader in how to study a Psalm. Instructive here is his observation that the Psalms provide "the deep grammar or the paradigmatic structure for Christian prayer" (15). We learn the movement from praise to petition and from intercession to gratitude from the dynamic structure of the Psalms themselves. We learn how to address God in prayer in ways consistent with God's character, which the Psalms describe by means of a wide range of images and metaphors. Witvliet does the reader a service here in providing a catalogue of these (18-20).

In the second part, Witvliet explains how the Psalms can be read, sung, and prayed in public worship. Witvliet competently addresses a number of practical considerations, including the criteria to be used for the selection of a Psalm, the position of the Psalm in the order of worship, as well as guidelines for solo, choral, and antiphonal reading. Pastors and worship leaders will find this part very useful.

A distinctive feature of this book is the wealth of resources for further study that Witvliet lists in the footnotes, special sections, and bibliography. Noteworthy is commentary on the Psalms excerpted from the classical writings of the tradition. Basil, Chrysostom, Luther, Calvin, Bonhoeffer, and others provide rich fare to the reader whose appetite has already been stimulated by the author's insightful and informed discussion on the Psalms and Christian worship.

—Christopher Dorn

The Crucifixion of Ministry, by Andrew Purves, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007. 149pp., \$16.00 (paper).

Andrew Purves cuts through all the layers of meaning in ministry to the most basic question, "Who are you Lord?" His purpose in this is to remind practicing

clergy and students of theology that it is the ministry of the living Christ in which we participate, and not our own ministries. It is only the ministry of Christ that is redemptive; ours are not. Therefore, our own ministries and aspirations to ministry must be put to death and our eyes must be turned to God. It is only when we notice what God is already doing in our churches and in our communities and “hitch our wagons to that,” that we can begin to enter into the continuing ministry of Jesus on earth.

Purves has written an accessible and passionate reminder to any of us who practice ministry in the name of Jesus Christ that it is the ministry of the living Christ which offers hope and salvation. He stands in our place and we are “bumped aside.” “He offers the worship, discipleship, faith and ministry that we thought we could offer but can’t. The crucifixion of our ministry is staggeringly good news. Now ministry is now possible for us, probably for the first time, as gospel” (p.26).

This book will speak directly to the heart of the pastor who has reached a point of weariness in ministry as well as to the student who is just beginning a life of service to God with warmth and passion, inspiring each to find Christ again, alive and active, in our midst.

– Amy Nyland

Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries, edited by Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. xxx, 930pp., \$49.95.

Most of us were taught that Judaism and Christianity parted ways at an early date – if not during the time of the Apostles, at least by the time of the Bar Kochba uprising in the 130s. Within the last decade, however, several scholars have challenged this paradigm from both Jewish and the Christian sides. We now know that normative, Rabbinic Judaism was not well established until the 4th century or later. The same is, of course, true for normative, orthodox Christianity. During the “early centuries,” there were a variety of Judaisms, including various Christian Judaisms, and a variety of Christianities, including various Jewish Christianities. It follows that there was a good deal of overlap and interaction between the two emerging religions, at least through the fourth century, and well into the Middle Ages.

For readers who are interested in learning more about this fascinating period, the volume reviewed here provides a wealth of essays on virtually every facet of Jewish Christianity. The title specifies “Jewish believers in Jesus” because the focus is on those Christians who are ethnically Jewish (as distinct from Gentile

Christians who espoused what modern scholars take to be a Jewish theology). In addition to familiar figures from the New Testament like James and Paul and their followers, and the communities of the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation, the volume includes chapters on the Jewish Christian traditions that are preserved in later Christian writings and church orders, Jewish Christian editing of the Pseudepigrapha, the pseudo-Clementine literature, the Ebionites, the Nazoreans, the Elchasites, archeological remains, and an excellent chapter on the changing attitudes toward (Jewish) Christians in Rabbinic texts. Due to the focus on ethnically Jewish Christians, there is no detailed discussion of Nag Hammadi treatises (like the Gospels of Thomas and Philip) that may have been influenced by Jewish ideas (see 246-7).

Of particular interest to our ministers of word and sacrament will be the chapter by Anders Ekenberg on the evidence for Jewish Christian material in some of the foundational documents of our Eucharistic liturgies like the Didache and the Apostolic Tradition (attributed to Hippolytus). Ekenberg follows David Fiensy in holding that the thanksgiving prayers in the 4th century Apostolic Constitutions are not taken directly from Synagogue benedictions (and so can not be used as evidence of Jewish practice), but from a century or more of distinctive Jewish Christian traditions (654).

Readers who travel to Israel can benefit from James Strange's chapter (with helpful maps) on archeological evidence of Jewish believers. The martyrrium in Nazareth has no trace of confirmed Jewish Christian presence, but the cave cistern in Bethany does, and so does the "Tomb of David" on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (732-40).

In short, most readers will find something of interest in this volume and benefit from the new perspective concerning the "ways that never parted."

— Christopher B. Kaiser

The Living Voice of the Gospels, by Francis J. Moloney, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. 344 pp., \$19.95.

This edition is a complete rewriting of Francis J. Moloney's contemporary reading of the four gospels, first published by Paulist Press in 1986. There have been many changes in gospel studies since, especially in literary and narrative readings, and they have greatly influenced the author's introductions in this edition.

The book is still intended for the interested lay reader. Moloney has been successful in avoiding technical language, and the book can be recommended to lay persons and to others interested in an in-depth study of a literary and narrative approach to the four gospels.

In the first chapter, Moloney describes the nature of a gospel as a special type of literature, the relationship between the four gospels, discrepancies that can be seen when comparing them, literary forms of the gospels, and how the character of each gospel is affected by the fact that it is written for the church by a different author. The authors looked back to the Jesus traditions they received and forward to the present and future needs of their own Christian communities as they composed their gospels.

There are four parts, one for each gospel, and each of them has a "Reading" of that gospel followed by a "Reading" of a particular passage of that gospel. For Mark the passage chosen is Mark 1:1-13, "A Prologue to the Gospel." In Matthew, Moloney has chosen 1:1-2:23, "The Infancy Narrative." In Luke, it is 22:1-24:53, "Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus," and in John, it is 6:1-71, "Bread from Heaven." Thus a gospel is viewed in its entirety and a particular part is then studied in detail to illustrate how the writers present their story of Jesus to make their own understanding and theology clear to their perceived readers, using the traditions about Jesus which they have received. Each chapter has notes and a selection of publications to which the reader might refer for further study.

The concluding part, entitled "The Gospels Today," gives a brief history of modern and contemporary gospel criticism. Again Moloney does so using as few technical terms as possible, and explaining and relating the various historical-critical approaches to the gospels and the quests for the historical Jesus. Readers might benefit from reading this last part of the book after the preface and first chapter, and then reading it again after completing the sections on all four of the gospels.

As minister and scholar Moloney does not hesitate in the last chapter to challenge the reader to respond to the call of Jesus to follow him and to listen and respond to his word who is the true bread from heaven that satisfies:

Finally, these reflections call us to recognize our vocation as disciples to 'life in Christ.' We are to 'put on Christ' so that we might recognize our dignity. All that is noble in us: our loving, our laughter, our play, our mission as preachers, our dancing, our eating and drinking, our praying alone or with others, our search for justice and peace, and the many other things that we do

in response to that which is deepest within us, is part of our journey to be as Jesus Christ was. (335)

Given the fact that Matthew and John claim that the Christian faith has replaced and is superior to the Jewish religion, this reviewer would have appreciated a section dealing with Christian-Jewish relations and how one lives and relates in a multiple faith and multicultural world. I believe that Moloney could well express his thoughts on the subject.

—David W. Jurgens

The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry, edited by Craig Van Gelder, Missional Church Series, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 253pp., \$ 20.00.

This volume of eight insightful essays is a valuable addition to the ongoing conversations on the missional church. While helping the reader to identify the intersection of missiology and ecclesiology, the writers remind congregations the significance of context in their life, witness, and self-understanding. The first section explores theological and historical resources for evolving contextual missiologies. The second part examines experiences and histories of four Protestant communities from various backgrounds. Added emphasis on Trinitarian theology and a quest for contextual missiologies are the connecting threads between the chapters.

Interpreting the history of missiology and identifying various phases of mission history in the first chapter, Van Gelder mines the theological and biblical resources helpful for congregations to develop contextual missiologies. Scott Frederickson argues that a perichoretic understanding of God (coinherence of the three persons), a radically deep Christology, and congregation's critical engagement with its context are essential components of a missional congregation. Drawing from the Reformation heritage, Gary M. Simpson redefines mission as *promissio*, *communicatio*, *communio*, and *vocatio*. Mark Lau Branson offers new ways of construing church and leadership.

The second section of the book considers the particular cases of Protestant communities in the United States, Indonesia, and Taiwan. Terri M. Elton narrates the stories of the United States and its Protestant Christianity, using the lens of discovery, democracy, equality, and diversity. Joon Ho Lee proposes a relevant missiological ecclesiology for the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Mary Dreier, citing the challenges facing the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and drawing resources from David Bosch, argues that a church should be missionary,

of The Netherlands, which joined this *Samen op Weg* ("together on the way") process in 1986. In 2004 the three separate synods formed the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Blei devotes his last chapter to a reflection on continuing Reformed identity in these changed cultural and ecclesial contexts.

– Christopher Dorn

The Promise of Baptism: An Introduction to Baptism in Scripture and the Reformed Tradition, by James V. Brownson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007, 223 pp., \$16.00.

Brownson's book addresses far-reaching ecclesial needs in giving a cogent biblical and theological exposition and defense of the Reformed tradition on baptism. As a biblical scholar, Brownson gives a richly textured canonical reading of scripture which pulls together the themes of covenant, union with Christ, the pouring out of the Spirit, and the missional calling of the church in ways that illuminate the church's baptismal practice. Brownson's awareness of the specific textual issues and problems of scripture passages related to baptism is very strong. Thus, while a book on baptism in the Reformed tradition could be written by a liturgical scholar or a systematic theologian, Brownson makes his most unique contributions in his treatment of specific textual issues that relate to the meaning and practice of Baptism in scripture.

The book has thirty short chapters, each organized around a pointed theological or pastoral question. Brownson begins by discussing the background to the question, gives biblical and theological background for the question at hand, and presents his constructive case. This is followed by bullet points of summary, discussion questions for the chapter, and a resource listed for further study.

Brownson's book comes at a time when the American church at large is revisiting the subject of baptism. While some Reformed and Presbyterian congregations are seeking to act as "baptist" as possible, some Baptists are beginning to wonder whether infant baptism might have legitimacy. What is clear on both sides is that the time has come to stop marginalizing baptism as a "non-essential" which is of little importance. Such marginalization results in a boiled down, generic Christianity which neither confronts the idolatries of our culture, nor faces scripture's exalted language about God's promises in baptism. This book is essential reading for this emerging discussion of baptism, and should be sought out by pastors and teachers who want to become more informed about this vital issue.

– J. Todd Billings

Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church, by Peter Schmiechen, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005. xi, 371pp., \$35.00.

Schmiechen contends that the message of the saving power of Christ's death and resurrection has become too closely associated with one particular – and particularly problematic – atonement theory (penal substitution), or at best with the three theories (Christus Victor, general transactional theory, liberal affirmation of love) of Gustaf Aulén's influential typology. This reduction in the number of images for thinking about the atonement has made the Church's task of communicating Christ's saving power more difficult, and has led it to abandon this very message that stands at the heart of the gospel.

For Schmiechen, revitalizing the church requires thinking about atonement in a variety of ways. So he devotes the majority of the book to demonstrating that, according to the biblical and historical witnesses, there are many theories of the atonement – ten, to be exact:

- Christ died for us: Sacrifice (as developed in the letter to Hebrews)
- Christ died for us: Justification (Luther)
- Christ died for us: Penal Substitution (Hodge)
- Liberation (Irenaeus and twentieth-century liberation theology)
- The purposes of God: Renewal of creation (Athanasius)
- The purposes of God: Restoration of creation (Anselm)
- The purposes of God: Christ the goal of creation (Schleiermacher)
- Reconciliation: Christ the way to the knowledge of God (H. R. Niebuhr)
- Reconciliation: Christ the reconciler (I Corinthians 1-2)
- Reconciliation: Wondrous love of God (Abelard, Wesley, Moltmann)

Schmiechen gives a clear introduction to each of these atonement theories. His love for system and typology tends to simplify. But this might urge advanced readers and those interested in systematic or constructive theology and the "theory of atonement theory," to examine the larger argument in which the typology functions (see the substantial introduction and conclusion). From the variety and irreducibility of the types, Schmiechen concludes that this theological diversity should be celebrated, for it better enables the church, in its diverse traditions and forms, to testify to the fullness of the saving power of Christ.

– Michael DeJonge

Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea, by Richard A. Horsley, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007. x, 262pp., \$24.95 (paper).

Richard Horsley is best known for his work on resistance movements led by prophets and bandits in Second-Temple Judea and the sociology of the Jesus movement. This latest book covers three of the most important Jewish texts of the Second Temple era: Daniel, the (deuteron-canonical) Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), and the pseudepigraphal Apocalypse of Enoch (1 Enoch). While many other treatments of these books are available, Horsley focuses on their political and economic context. He also challenges the widespread division between wisdom texts and apocalyptic texts, or between wisdom theology and an apocalyptic worldview, all of which Horsley regards as scholarly (i.e. literary) constructs (2-3, 132, 195-6, 199, 203-4).

Horsley rejects the traditional view of scribes like ben Sira as academicians who worked in “wisdom schools” and wrote “wisdom literature.” Scribes served as retainers for aristocratic patrons who cooperated with imperial officials of the Hellenistic world. They performed a variety of functions: orally teaching Torah, writing down oracles for prophets and reciting them to administrators, advising rulers, even serving as ambassadors for their patrons (84-7, 173). Their expertise in the Torah and Prophets provided them with a sense of authority (from God) and cultivated a deep concern for the poor who were exploited by the aristocracy (67-9, 146, 172, 174, 194). Horsley has evidently moderated the sharp contrast of “great” and “little traditions” that characterized his earlier writing. The scribes he describes fulfilled a mediating function between the upper and lower classes.

One of the principal insights I derived from this book has to do with intertextuality in the Bible – the citation of biblical texts by later writers. Horsley supports earlier observations that these citations were recited from memory, rather than by reading written scrolls. But he goes a step further to show that in many cases such citations were not quotations of specific biblical texts but selections from various repertoires or “registers” of biblical language. The scribal repertoire includes perennial topics like creation, wisdom, and theophany (142-3, 158). So-called “citations” of the Old Testament in the New could be rethought along these lines.

With regard to Daniel, Horsley shows how the role of scribes can explain details like the heavenly books that will be opened on the day of judgment (Dan. 7:10). In stressing the social-political context, Horsley does not negate the mythic aspects of apocalyptic texts like Daniel. Rather he integrates them with contemporary politics. So the one like a human being or “son of man” in Daniel 7:13-14 is an angelic being who is portrayed as nonviolent, in pointed contrast to the Gentile beasts and also the Canaanite god, Lord Storm (Ba’al, 183). The “holy

ones of the Most High” whom the one like a human being represents in Daniel 7:18, 22 are angelic guardians over the Judean temple-state. The deliverance described in Daniel 12:1-3 is a restoration of the covenant faithful and vindication of the wise scribes (“like the stars”), not (yet) an eschatological resurrection of the body or renewal of the cosmos (188, 190, 198-200).

In general, Horsley finds much more continuity between apocalyptic literature and earlier prophetic traditions (particularly those concerning the divine council) than scholars like John Collins have allowed (158, 182-3, 198-9, 204). As far as the Books of Enoch and Daniel are concerned, Horsley would abolish the scholarly construct of “apocalyptic” with its conventional demarcation of this age and the age to come. In its place, he refers to these texts as “historical visions” that combine prophetic vision with cosmological and mantic wisdom (199-200).

Horsley’s writing is always provocative, emerging as it does from the orality of the university classroom (University of Massachusetts, Boston). He unrelentingly attacks the simplistic, print-culture assumptions of other scholars. He sometimes overstates his case for orality, saying in one place that written texts were reserved as icons and not meant to be read at all (11, 99-102), only to have to explain away the use to extant written texts at Qumran and in ben Sira (112-20). What we have is a wealth of material from the “cultural repertoires” of early Judaism and Christianity, so it may take some time for scholars to rethink it all. Horsley’s work should help inspire a new generation of scholars to make the effort.

—Christopher B. Kaiser

Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vander Werp, by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006, 210 pp., \$25.00.

Son of Secession provides an analysis of nineteenth-century Dutch-American history. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres initial interest in the subject began with a family discovery. Twice, in the Netherlands and in North America, her Sjaarda ancestors had been parishioners of Douwe J. Vander Werp. Working at Calvin College, Sheeres was familiar with the name of Vander Werp. Unable to locate a biography of the man, Sheeres wrote her own. This biography of Douwe J. Vander Werp provides a vital contribution to the Dutch Reformed Church history.

Douwe J. Vander Werp, the son of a Groninger schipper (boatman), as an adult became a school teacher, pastor, church planter, editor, theological educator, and leader of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Earlier in his life,

Vander Werp became a protégé of Hendrik De Cock, one of the leaders of the *Afgescheiding*. Belonging to the northern wing of the secession, Vander Werp was a strong defender of the Canons of Dort. In 1864, Vander Werp and his family immigrated to America, and became the pastor of the Graafschaap Church, outside of Holland, Michigan.

Sheeres not only highlights the Vander Werp's professional persona, but describes the tragedies which permeated his personal life: the deaths of three of his wives and two of his sons. At his own death in 1876, which Sheeres attributes to smoking related cancer, Vander Werp was survived by his fourth wife, Gerritdina Brummeler, eight children, a legacy in the ministry, his writing, and his theological students.

In the Epilogue, Sheeres claims that the book might have been entitled *Son of Secessions* in the plural: first, about Vander Werp's disaffiliating from the Reformed Church in the Netherlands; second, his joining the *Kruisgezinden*; and third, his joining the fledgling Christian Reformed Church, which seven years earlier had seceded from the Reformed Church.

I personally enjoyed this historical and biographical portrait of Douwe Vander Werp. Sheeres masterfully captures his conscientious struggles as well as the joys of the pastoral life.

— Barry L. Wynveen

Who's Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church, by James K. A. Smith, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006. 156pp., \$17.99.

Postmodernism is an elusive concept, but it is one that church leaders and intellectuals must grapple with, since it generates the prevailing intellectual winds of our day.

Smith does a remarkable job in his book to offer a basic understanding of postmodernism. He focuses on the work of three continental philosophers (Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault), who are considered to be the founders of postmodern thinking. He also shows how their views are often been reduced to single-sentence "bumper-sticker" quotes that are taken out of context and misunderstood. Smith suggests these three thinkers, if understood correctly in their proper context, can help the church recover from its modern ways and rediscover its ancient roots.

The author opens each chapter with a scenes from a notable film like *The Matrix*, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, noting that "film is the new lingua franca" in the postmodern age (24). He uses these scenes to provide the groundwork for explaining each philosopher and presenting his own conclusions. We find via Derrida that all knowledge is fundamentally interpretation, and so the church's interpretation should be governed by scripture. We learn from Lyotard that all knowledge is based on some sort of faith and has an inherent bias. From this Smith concludes that the church must let faith govern its worldview instead of reason. We learn from Foucault that knowledge is dictated to us by persons in power with a goal of forming us into images that are advantageous to power systems. From this Smith concludes that the church must use its power to disciple people into living like Christ. Smith's analysis of these philosophers and their respective ideas from a Christian perspective is eye-opening, particularly for anyone who has difficulty nailing-down the concepts of postmodernism.

In his conclusion, Smith makes shifts from theory to practice and applies and develops a postmodern worship service, complete with poems, scented candles, and Old Testament lectionary readings as dances. Unfortunately, Smith's prescription is relevant only to well-educated churches accustomed to high-brow liturgy and extensive symbolic communication. This kind of worship would be a charade to the majority of people – especially young people – who crave faith communicated in the "straightforward" and "down-to-earth" vernacular.

– Aaron Vriesman

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